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An Evaluation of Full Service Extended Schools and Full Service Community Network

Education and Training Inspectorate

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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

1. Introduction

1.1 The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012 identified three main themes to guide those working with children and young people (learners¹). These were, achieving value, learning skills and transforming communities. The themes encompass key issues in education and training such as:

- the links between good public value and high achievements and standards for all learners;
- the need for learners to acquire and develop the skills which will help them address the many personal, social and economic challenges they face to enable them to compete in a global economy; and
- the aspiration for education to transform the lives of individuals and communities for the better.

1.2 In 2006 the Government published a ten year strategy² for children and young people in Northern Ireland (NI). The strategy sets out a vision for the future and a series of high level outcomes and policy measures designed to improve the life chances for children and young people. The strategy states that 'we will know that we have achieved our shared vision for our children and young people if, after ten years, we can report progress and evidence exists, which indicates that our children and young people are:

- healthy;
- enjoying learning and achieving;
- living in safety and with stability;
- experiencing economic and environmental well-being;
- contributing positively to community and society; and
- living in a society which respects 'their rights'.

1.3 During January 2013, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) undertook an evaluation of the provision within Full Service Extended Schools (FSES), delivered from the Belfast Boys' Model School (BBMS) and the Belfast Model School for Girls (BMSG). At the same time the ETI conducted an evaluation of the Full Service Community Network (FSCN), which carries out its work within the Greater Falls and Upper Springfield areas of West Belfast.

This report assesses the quality of support provided by both Full Service programmes, and the effectiveness of that support in terms of the progress being made in raising standards and achievements. In the terms of reference ETI was asked to:

- (i) consider how the Belfast Model Schools and FSCN assess need in offering their particular range of activities;

¹ Throughout this report the term 'learners' refers to the children and young people from 3-19 years of age, who were the central focus of the evaluation.

² Our Children and Young People – Our Pledge: A Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People in Northern Ireland 2006 - 2016

- (ii) identify the extent to which both Full Service Programmes collaborate with other agencies, schools and organisations (i.e. parents, neighbourhood renewal, local community/voluntary groups, feeder primary schools, and counselling providers);
- (iii) assess the effectiveness of such collaborations, particularly those commissioned/purchased from external providers, highlighting any identified displacement or substitution of education services which should properly be provided within schools;
- (iv) consider what procedures are in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of the support services provided to date and what evidence exists to assess the impact on the children's learning experiences, and their emotional, physical and social development; and
- (v) identify the key features of effective Full Service provision with due regard to value for money and identify what improved educational outcomes have been achieved across schools benefiting from additional Full Service provision.

The report outlines the key findings from the evaluation, and records recommendations for the Department of Education (DE), working in partnership with other government departments, to consider.

2. Background information

2.1 North and West Belfast includes some of the most seriously deprived electoral wards in NI. The learners, their families and communities live in areas that continue to undergo periods of significant civil unrest. The period during which this evaluation was conducted was one such example.

2.2 The DE funds two Full Service Programmes under governance arrangements, and through project boards, with the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). These programmes seek to enhance the life chances of young people by ensuring improved educational attainment through addressing the real and specific needs of learners, their families and the local communities. The two programmes in place are entitled:

- 'Full Service Extended Schools', located at the Belfast Boys' Model School and the Belfast Model School for Girls, with a project board managed by BELB;
- 'Full Service Community Network', located at the Whiterock campus of Belfast Metropolitan College, with a project board managed by CCMS.

Both programmes serve to implement existing government strategies and contribute to a more coherent education policy by working effectively with and through statutory, voluntary and community organisations. In the FSCN programme the focus is very much on early intervention with the parents of children of pre-school and primary school age. Whereas in the FSES programme, the focus is on working with families of learners of post-primary age, while at the same time, strengthening the links with the children and families of primary schools.

3. Methodology

3.1 The ETI visited a range of participating schools, organisations and agencies and focused their observations on important aspects of education provision which are supported directly by FSES/FSCN. The team held discussions with the representatives of the key contributory organisations, observed 60 programmed activities, interventions and lessons, and where possible, took account of the views of the young people, parents, management and staff. In addition, interviews were held with the chairs of both project management boards. An important feature of this evaluation was the opportunity taken to meet with parents in their own homes or in locations other than schools.

3.2 The evaluation focused on the effectiveness of the following key areas of provision:

- assessment of need;
- collaboration with other agencies;
- procedures for monitoring and evaluation; and
- key features of the two programmes.

3.3 Prior to the inspection, the Principals of the Full Service schools and the manager of the community network were invited to complete a self-evaluation of the quality of provision within their organisations with regard to the terms of reference described above. The completed self-evaluation proformas were of a high quality and made an important contribution to the overall evaluation process. The FSES/FSCN staff have become highly skilful in gathering and analysing qualitative and quantitative data to support their ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes.

4. Executive summary

Assessment of need

- The contribution of the FSES and the FSCN has led to a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to the prioritisation and delivery of services available to support vulnerable learners and their families in North and West Belfast.
- The arrangements for assessing the increasingly diverse needs of the learners and their families are a particular strength of both Full Service Programmes.

Collaboration with other agencies

- The collaborative arrangements for supporting the diverse pastoral needs of the learners are a particular strength of the Full Service programmes, and recognised as such by the parents and young people interviewed.
- The needs of the Irish-medium (IM) sector are reflected strongly in the FSCN programme. The FSCN crosses sectoral boundaries to cater for the whole community of learners within West Belfast. Most of the IM leaders engage fully with the services of the FSCN and, in so doing, they place the needs of the children and their parents first. Vulnerable children are supported effectively. Among the gains are improved pupil attendance and in the majority of schools there is internal evidence of improving scores by the children on a range of standardised tests, in particular, in relation to English. Invaluable,

complementary support is provided to both teachers and parents, and early intervention measures are proving beneficial to the children and their parents. The education workers provide support in basic English to groups of children in key stage (KS) 2. In these sessions, there is a sharp focus on phonics, spellings and word recognition. The Barnardo's education workers provide support in the naíscoileanna³ to improve the listening skills and to address attention deficit with groups of children. In addition, advice is given to parents in relation to a wide range of areas including the importance and encouragement of talk, making proper time for play with their children at home, incorporating good Irish language support and the acquisition of simple vocabulary, and the use of games to stimulate curiosity and talk.

- Barnardo's is a key player and critical partner providing effective access and a swift response to expertise, human resources and services not readily available in schools. The particular focus and dimension provided by the Full Service team has influenced the approaches to pastoral care adopted by many of the schools who work in partnership with them. In addition, other schools have modified their strategies to tackle under-achievement and have amended their School Development Plans (SDP) and invested in better targeted professional development for the staff.
- High levels of trust, openness and transparency characterise the effective working relationships which have emerged as a result of the collaborations among the partner organisations working in support of parents and their families across both programmes.

Procedures for monitoring and evaluation

- Continuing monitoring and evaluation arrangements which focus appropriately on improved outcomes for learners, ensure that staff are provided with important information on individual children and young people to help them overcome short-term barriers to their learning. The contributions of agencies are monitored effectively to ensure that there is no overlap of service provision.
- Appropriate consultation with parents, learners, schools and support workers forms an important part of the monitoring and evaluation process. For example, parents report that their views are taken onboard and acted upon.

Key features of the two programmes

- The staff members with key responsibilities in the FSES and FSCN are highly motivated and display a strong commitment to the welfare of the learners (and to the parents) committed to their care.
- They are discerning of the characteristics of learners, their family circles and wider community which may increase vulnerability and challenge educational, personal and social development.
- Many invest substantial periods of their own time in response to the complexity and demands of this type of work which often requires sensitive responses of support within a tight timeframe.

³ Naíscoileanna are Irish-medium pre-school settings.

- There is a growing level of expertise within schools in the extent to which they address the complex social and emotional development needs of learners. In particular, there is a greater focus on developing further the capacity of all staff to deal more effectively with the increase in behavioural difficulties at the earliest stage possible.
- The quality of the teaching and learning in the sessions, lessons and interventions observed, ranged from good to outstanding; it was very good or outstanding in around three-quarters of them, and, in one-quarter, the interventions were outstanding.
- The contribution made by counselling services in primary and post-primary schools plays an increasingly important role in supporting the emotional well-being and health of learners and their families. However, the absence of a counselling service in primary schools across NI continues to be an issue, particularly at KS 2.
- Learners, particularly those of post-primary age, and their families, are better aware of the range of support that exists within the school and the wider community to contribute to their educational progress. In both Full Service Programmes, the inclusive nature of the support offered has reduced the perceived stigma attached to receiving assistance either as an individual or as a family.
- Within the FSES provision, a whole-school commitment to the objectives of the work is continuing to develop. The SDPs and associated action plans reflect well the degree of collaboration among the professionals who deliver programmes on behalf of FSES.
- On the evidence available at the time of the evaluation FSES and FSCN have comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding learners, which reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Departments.

5. Recommendations

(relating to possible future trends in education provision.)

- a. Dealing effectively with the increasingly heterogeneous nature of the classroom

As noted in previous evaluation reports⁴, the changing and more complex learner profile, is a growing challenge for school leaders, staff, teacher educators and employing authorities. The demand for expertise is increasing as patterns of need pass from one generation to another. There is a need, therefore, to focus attention on breaking the cycle of deprivation, and on finding the correct balance between providing support when necessary, and encouraging and developing the skills of learners and their families to support themselves.

⁴ An area-based evaluation of the adequacy, accessibility and the extent of integration of the range of services to support the emotional well-being and health of children and young people in the Fermanagh area. March 2009.

b. Targeted Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Appropriate professional development will be required to meet better the needs of the teachers, education support workers and other frontline staff. Many of the staff interviewed identified the need for continuing professional development in several important aspects of their work, including improving their capacity to deal more effectively with the emotional well-being and health of learners.

c. The development of quality indicators

To meet this need it will be necessary to engage in joint inter-disciplinary professional development to share methodologies and develop agreed quality indicators on what constitutes the most effective support system for vulnerable learners and their families. Once developed, the quality indicators should be used to inform the establishment of a continuum of provision to match the increasing diversity of need.

d. Planning the Workforce Model

To prepare for the future needs of learners and their families, the workforce model in nursery, primary, and post-primary schools needs to be reviewed. A future model should include a greater number of community-based, education workers who bring different but complementary expertise and other skills required to address the learning needs of the children, young people and their families. It will be important, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, to establish a more appropriate balance between the teaching workforce and community educational support and/or mentoring staff, in order to integrate the skills of the external professional support agencies more effectively.

e. An inter-departmental and inter-agency approach

Effective partnerships between education and other statutory agencies are not yet the norm; more needs to be done to consolidate and build upon the work that has begun here.

6. Conclusion: Moving forward

The most recent Chief Inspector's Report refers to transforming communities; there is a developing evidence base to suggest that the overall impact of FSES and FSCN is contributing to the transformation of communities particularly with regard to:

- raising aspirations for learners and their families;
- strengthening the sense of community and its contribution to education as a community enterprise; and
- raising the confidence of parents to engage more effectively with schools in supporting their children's learning.

There are important strengths in the focus taken in both FSES and FSCN. In the FSCN the target of support is very much on the youngest children and their parents. Whereas in the FSES, the focus of support is on the learners and their families, as they transfer from primary to post-primary. Moving forward, it will be important to share the expertise which has developed in both approaches; and to maximise and sustain the impact of these interventions from pre-school, through primary school, into post-primary school and on to employment, further and/or higher education.

Schools alone cannot meet all of the increasingly complex needs of learners and their families. The high level outcomes of the children's and young people's strategy are there to guide the work of all government departments and it is incumbent upon each of them to work in a more cohesive and connected way to benefit the learners, their families and their communities.

In 2003, the head of the Civil Service in the foreword to 'A Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland' stated, ⁵:

'Those involved at the 'front line' of service delivery, whether in schools, hospitals or social security offices, have a vital role in helping to gauge what is deliverable. They have a keen awareness of what really matters to the citizen. In order to develop policies which work in practice the guide emphasises the importance of engaging those familiar with delivery issues, and service users themselves, early in the process [of developing policy]'.

The quality of the extensive support provided through the FSES and FSCN is very good. The organisations involved are meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners and their families, and have demonstrated their capacity for sustained self-improvement.

⁵ A practical guide to policy making in Northern Ireland. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. 2003.

CASE STUDIES

Belfast Boys' Model School

Background

Pupil A is currently in Year 13. Concerns regarding this pupil were first raised with the attendance officer when the pupil was in Year 11. His attendance had fallen to 78%. The pupil lives with his grandmother and a younger sibling. Both the pupil and his grandmother were experiencing violence at the hands of the younger sibling. The pupil had mental health issues as a result.

Interventions

The 'Full Service' attendance officer implemented various support strategies to address the pupil's poor attendance record. As a result of the attendance officer's intervention, deeper family-related emotional issues were uncovered. The attendance officer and the parenting support worker made a number of home visits and were able to signpost the family to:

- the local general practitioner regarding concerns about the pupil's mental health;
- Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide (PIPS) for an emergency session to address the suicidal feelings the pupil was having as a result of the domestic violence;
- the Wolfhill Centre for advice on benefit entitlements for the family; and
- the Child and Family Clinic for family counselling for both pupil and grandmother.

In addition, longer term counselling was put in place with Streetbeat, a counselling service funded through the Full Service (FS) initiative, for the pupil and his grandmother. Through the school's 'Alternatives' programme, part-funded by FS, the pupil was able to return to school on a part-time basis. This facilitated a smooth re-integration into school life. It also reduced the stress around the volume of missed work by providing a suitable mechanism for catching up.

Outcomes

The pupil successfully completed Year 12, achieving 5 GCSEs grades A*-C. In 2011-12, he returned to Year 13 and successfully completed a one year course. Building on this success the pupil returned to senior school in 2012-13 to complete a two-year level 3 course. He has improved his self-esteem and confidence, and states, 'the school didn't just give up on me'. Family life is reported as more settled. The grandmother has attended night classes at Belfast Boys' Model School and states, 'there has been a big improvement at home, things are much better now, thanks for all the help...' Good working relationships exist between the family and the school. Support is still provided by the attendance officer and parenting support worker as and when required.

Belfast Model School for Girls

Background

Pupil B is a 14 year old girl initially referred for mentoring due to challenging behaviour in school. The pupil was unable to accept school consequences regarding the breaking of rules and was also unable to accept responsibility for her own behaviour, often regressing to extremely childish behaviour and tantrums. The pupil's mother struggled with her own mental health and felt unable to leave the house; she would not attend parent meetings or return the form for suspension meetings. In this instance it was therefore appropriate to conduct a number of home visits to help support the mother in setting down boundaries and consequences for pupil B at home. Both pupil B and her mother were able to see the very unhealthy relationship which had developed between them whereby pupil B bullied her mother to get what she wanted and had become aggressive in doing so; the mother had contacted the police several times out of fear of her daughter.

Interventions

By Easter 2012 discussions in school had begun about finding an alternative education placement for pupil B as her aggressive behaviour had reached the point where a number of teachers were unhappy to have her in the room. In a final attempt to keep pupil B in school the educational support worker was involved in putting together a 6 week programme for a small group of girls who were all at risk of exclusion. Parental engagement remained key to the success of the programme and with much encouragement and support pupil B's mother was able to come to school and spend time with the psychologist who was employed as a main aspect of the programme. Pupil B's mother benefited greatly from the contact and support received through the programme both from the psychologist and from the education worker and began to see some gradual improvements in her daughter's behaviour; she developed the confidence to use the suggested strategies to cope with her daughter's aggressive behaviour. At the end of this programme, to sustain the improvements, a referral was made to the 'Integrated Services for Children and Young People' (ISCYP) family support service for extra support for the mother.

Outcomes

In September 2012 pupil B got a Secondary Pupil Support Service (SPSS) placement at the LINK centre in order to sustain her for a longer period in education; this placement has just reached its conclusion. Over this period it has become clear that mainstream education is no longer appropriate in meeting pupil B's complex needs. Having refused a Loughshore placement, pupil B is now educated between Loughshore, home tuition and individual tuition in school. With the support of the LINK centre and Shankill Women's Centre, the school has been able to obtain a work placement for pupil B for 2 days each week. The in-house alternative education programme provided by the educational support worker has been made possible by the effective collaboration among professionals working for SPSS/LINK centre, ISCYP family support, Streetbeat counselling and the clinical psychologist.

Full Service Community Network

Background

Parent C moved into the Upper Springfield area of West Belfast in the summer before her eldest son was due to start primary (P) 1. To help her integrate into the community and help her son settle into P1, she attended courses in the parent's room in St. Aidan's Christian Brothers' Primary School. The courses were being led by the Barnardo's Schools Programme Parent worker (funded through the school's Extended Schools budget).

Intervention

When her child started P2, his class teacher recommended that he join the 'Incredible Years – Dina Group' as he was presenting with some behavioural issues such as the need to develop his ability to ignore distractions and concentrate in class. The programme is delivered by the FSCN education workers. His mother was more than willing to let her son join the group. His classroom teacher is also taking part in the 'Incredible Years - Teacher Classroom Management' programme. His teacher is using 'Dina' strategies, such as 'show me five hand' for all the children in her class. These strategies are designed to develop attention and listening skills.

Outcomes

The teacher has reported a noted improvement in the boy's ability to ignore distractions and complete tasks in the classroom. When Parent C was informed of the 'Incredible Years – School Readiness' programme, starting in another school, she was enthusiastic about joining as she wanted to use the same strategies that her son was using in the 'Dina' school programme. She has now followed this on by attending the 'Incredible Years' 12 week parenting course. She has reported a positive change in her son's behaviours at home and is actively encouraging her husband to use the same strategies at home. Parent C is an advocate for the work done in the parent's room and is encouraging other parents to come and join in the activities that are being delivered, as well as encouraging parents to take part in the 'Incredible Years' courses.

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